

L E N O W I S C O
P L A N N I N G D I S T R I C T C O M M I S S I O N

PRESS RELEASE

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The development of public wastewater collection and treatment infrastructure is one of the most challenging issues facing local governments within the LENOWISCO, Cumberland Plateau, and Mount Rogers Planning Districts of Southwest Virginia. There are areas served by public sanitary sewerage systems that have issues with coordinating service to constituents due to existing service area boundaries and system capacity. Many existing sewerage systems are aging and becoming inadequate to serve their current customer base. These systems are not in a position to expand to serve adjacent areas of growth and development that warrant service, but are still not served. Moreover, there are existing clusters of residential development that currently have no acceptable means of wastewater treatment. These households are currently discharging into inadequate septic systems or directly discharging into streams. Obviously, these problems create major environmental problems, and are barriers to the region's economic growth and development.

The LENOWISCO, Cumberland Plateau, and Mount Rogers Planning District Commissions have partnered to help address these challenging issues. The United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Utility Service, the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission, and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development have provided funding for the completion of a comprehensive regional wastewater service plan for planning districts One, Two, and Three.

The *Southwest Virginia Regional Wastewater Study* will serve as a road map for the future implementation of wastewater collection and treatment projects in Southwest Virginia, just as the *Virginia Coalfields Regional Water Study* did in 1998. The Virginia General Assembly provided funding for the *Virginia Coalfields Regional Water Study*, the first study ever to identify and evaluate regional solutions for the drinking water problems in the LENOWISCO and Cumberland Plateau Planning Districts. The purpose of the study was to develop and evaluate, without regard to geographical or political boundaries, alternatives for regionalized water systems capable of providing water service to previously unserved areas and improving service to areas currently served. The alternatives included interconnections between existing and proposed systems within the two planning districts. Interconnections were studied and recommended that would provide service to large groups of currently unserved citizens who would not be candidates for inclusion in traditionally funded projects.

To date, approximately \$40 million of fully funded projects are under construction or have been completed in the LENOWISCO District alone as a result of the *Virginia Coalfields Regional Water Study*. This dollar amount translates to approximately 3,215 households or



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8,038 persons being served with public water for the first time. Approximately 72% of the residents in Lee, Scott, and Wise counties are now served by public water service as a result of the very successful study. However, only 43% in the same counties are served by public sewer service.

The Planning Districts Commissions held their “Kick-Off” Meeting for the *Southwest Virginia Regional Wastewater Study* on January 26, 2005 at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon. The consultant team procured for the study, Thompson & Litton, Lane Engineering, and MAXIM Engineering, detailed the overall scope and goal of the study. Representatives of the United States Department of Agriculture’s Rural Utility Service, the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission, and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, funding agencies that provided funding for the study, were on hand to voice their support of the study and eagerness to fund sewer projects that will be identified as a result of the study. In addition, the large crowd included representatives of US Senators John Warner and George Allen and US Congressman Rick Boucher; watershed groups; federal and state regulatory agencies; public service authorities; local elected officials; town managers; and county administrators. While state legislators have been fully supportive of this initiative, the fact the General Assembly was in session prevented them from attending in person.

A draft of the study is proposed to be finished by September and the final version will be unveiled in late November/early December. And, in the same way the regional water planning resulted in “on the ground” results, the PDCs are anticipating a vigorous follow-up with project construction for the highest priority projects over the next five years.

For additional comments, please contact:

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